

utopic visions -- earthly transmitters

Terminal Project Report

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Introduction

Utilizing a feedback loop process which involves wearables, print and video, I condition spaces for shifting assumptions about sense and nonsense, creating portals of play, transformation, and reinvention of identity. Wearables function as a visible symbol of a self-construct and as a nonverbal method of communicating values to others. I likewise bypass language by utilizing print and video to document and relate information visually. Pervading all aspects of my work is an undercurrent of resistance - to language as a default tool of communication, to social division as a byproduct of mass-media advertising and consumerism, and to the status quo of labor and production.

Images of a value system

Images are a powerful source of instruction and demonstration of what is possible, what things go together, what belongs and what doesn't belong. I use images as a mode of communication to bypass the linguistic systematization of the lived world and to access a realm of experiential understanding. Language is capable of manifesting images in the receiver's mind, yet visual forms act as an immediate window, engaging direct experiences of another's ideas. Wassily Kandinsky was adamant about the power of formalism as a tool for visual communication beyond language. Primary colors and shapes could be used to create and communicate a universalist society. But while Kandinsky's methodical investigations laid the groundwork for high modernism, I utilize form and color in a spontaneous, improvisational manner to create a self-referential environment for playful exploration.



"Gatekeeper"
 CMYK serigraphy on paper
 68 x 84 inches
 2015



"Self Portrait"
 CMYK serigraphy on paper, collage
 96 x 65 inches
 2015

As the historical and practical technique of advertisement, political endorsement and mass dissemination of manifestos and other ideas, print speaks to a collective endeavor, public participation and social movement. Intentionally misusing the process of CMYK graphic reproduction, I imply the potential of print to create a particular social reality. I relinquish an aspect of control and remove rigid adherence to accuracy by embracing the inherent variability of reproduction. I print images captured through still and video footage of actual events, where I and others were present in front of the camera, exploring movement and interactivity facilitated by my wearable objects. Yet through successive transformations, the original image becomes distorted, a scrambled signal in a call for reexamination of habits and routines. The print collage becomes a formal investigation of visual "chords," which spark a vibration and a recognition of underlying structures and

patterns. “When images are there to cut, fold, connect or manufacture, their purpose is to help us do things beyond the classical task of categorizing and confirming.”¹ Images become tools of investigation, not simply representations.



“Serpent Enactment”
video still
2015



“Serpent Struggle”
aquatint and line etching on paper
5.75 x 4.5 inches plate size
2016

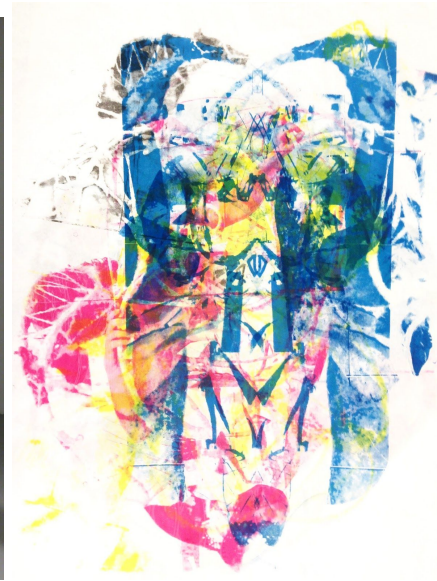
As still images are sourced from moving footage, a digestion begins through digital and analog screens. Structure and pattern is examined, enhanced and revised in reproduction. The digital camera and video editing software are literal and metaphorical “teeth,” capturing and breaking up larger chunks of time into immediate moments. Subsequent reprinting of the digital in the traditional etching medium solidifies the ephemeral moment into a relic of the past. The etchings utilize a documentation process rooted in the legacy of scientific knowledge found in historical atlases and manuals. Meanwhile, images screenprinted on fabrics become wearable, while paper screenprints

¹ Paglen, Trevor, and Peter Galison. “The Lives of Images: Peter Galison in Conversation with Trevor Paglen.” *Aperture Magazine* June 2013: 33-39. Print.

are cut and rearranged into new configurations. These print techniques provide material for future settings and enactments, perpetuating the process of production and reproduction.



"Steerer"
video still
2015



"Steerer Collage No. 23"
CMYK serigraphy on paper
48 x 36 inches

Another point of entrance into this world of image-making are the wearable forms. These are conceived as opportunities to enact archetypes, modify movements and, consequently, influence self-perception. These wearables are tools with which to generate images, both in print and in the mind. Externalizing the personal interior through stylized forms, the costumes function as models and tools to tap into human roots, building an anthropological framework through which to view experiences of birth, death, attraction and transformation. At the same time, the wearables allude to organisms distinctly not human. Oskar Schlemmer's 1922 Triadic Ballet utilized geometric costumes to create stiff, mechanistic movement in the dancers, emphasizing the burgeoning mechanical technology pervading every aspect of society. My costumes reference cocoons, tubes, membranes and

exoskeletons to indicate associations with the insect world, where spectacular transformations from earthbound larvae and caterpillars to aerial beetles and butterflies occur as standard procedure, while other species communicate complicated directions through pheromones and dances. The insect reference functions as a symbolic manifestation of the unseen digital realm of the internet, satellite communications and global patterns of commerce and exchange which spread a pervasive web over every aspect of human activity. It is also a reference to the hive mind, a collective awareness of unity, a utopia of common understanding and cooperative goals.



"Cocoon Enactment"
video still
2015

Potential of enactment: movements and interactions

One historical precedent upon which my work builds is the European cabaret tradition, which experienced a heyday simultaneously with the emergence of the DADA movement. The cabaret performance was an evening of short, spontaneous, interactive skits and musical performances which satirised and recombined familiar social elements with art and everyday life. Assimilation of audience members often occurred by requirements to put on a silly hat at the entrance.² This type of approach not only leveled the social hierarchies present at such events, but also provided a vehicle for the audience to become part of the experience, instead of solely observing from the side. In his voluminous tome, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains that we cannot remove the object of our perception from the surrounding environment,

“Movement is not thought about movement and bodily space is not space thought of or represented. ‘Each voluntary movement takes place in a setting, against a background which is determined by the movement itself....We perform our movements in a space which is not ‘empty’ or unrelated to them, but which on the contrary, bears a highly determinate relation to them: movement and background are, in fact, only artificially separated stages of a unique totality.”³

Cabaret performances recognized the intertwining nature between the performer and the audience. The cabaret was a method not of providing answers or “setting directions for visions of the future” but of affirming the questions and encouraging committed audiences to pursue their own chosen paths of action, “by helping people move toward

² Bowlt, John E. "Thoughts on the Russian and Soviet Cabaret." *"Event" Arts and Art Events*. Ed. Stephen C. Foster. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research, 1988. 87-106. Print. 94.

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty quoting Goldstein's *Über die Abhängigkeit* in *Phenomenology of Perception*, (first edition 1945,) 2002 p. 159.

goals that they themselves have deemed desirable.”⁴ This exciting participatory approach propelled the breakdown of the fourth wall in other formal theater productions but was subdued after the rise of authoritative governments, especially in Communist Russia. Aspects of the cabaret tradition continue to prevail in street theater and other performance processes which encourage participation and interaction. My work draws on these principles of interactivity between audience and “performer” when the wearables are deployed at art events and in every-day situations.

I employ wearables to invoke a taxonomy of various archetypal actions as entry to basic human experiences, recognizing the body as common ground for all. These costumes activate a journey of self-exploration, identity, and interaction with others, stimulating bodily awareness, extending and modifying the limits of the human figure. Lygia Clark envisioned making and interacting with objects as the art itself, with movement and dance as a vehicle of transformation. Her work activated a spontaneous, elevated awareness of the un-self-conscious body. She was also invested in finding ways to obfuscate the boundaries between self and other through objects and exercises driven by psychoanalysis and cognitive therapy that she herself underwent during the course of her life.⁵ Clark’s approach similarly drives my investigation of movement through wearables. The objects take on a new life when they encase the human figure, while the wearer experiences a new awareness of one’s own physical existence through the use of the wearable.

⁴ Greenberg, Allan. "Reflections on the Cabaret: Art, Transaction, Event." *"Event" Arts and Art Events*. Ed. Stephen C. Foster. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research, 1988. 107-18. Print. 116.

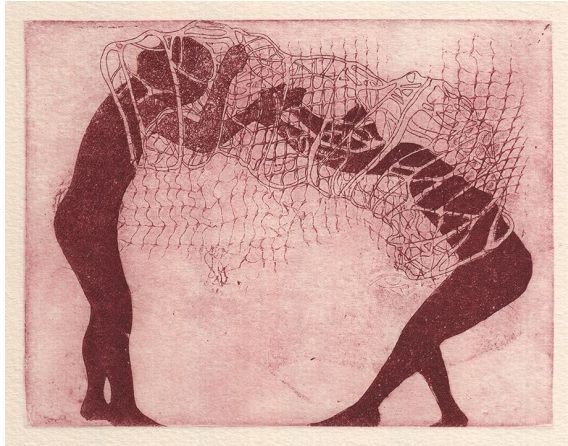
⁵ Macel, Christine. "At the Border of Art." *Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art, 1948-1988*. By Cornelia H. Butler, Luis Perez Oramas, and Lygia Clark. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014. 253-60. Print.

Today, enclothed cognition is a scientifically demonstrated aspect of identity as the idea that people act and perceive themselves differently when they wear symbolic items of clothing. Researchers at Northwestern University,

“posit that wearing clothes causes people to ‘embody’ the clothing and its symbolic meaning. Consequently, when a piece of clothing is worn, it exerts an influence on the wearer's psychological processes by activating associated abstract concepts through its symbolic meaning—similar to the way in which a physical experience, which is, by definition, already embodied, exerts its influence.”⁶

The results of their experiments demonstrated that individuals who believed they were wearing doctors' lab coats performed better on cognitive assessments than participants who either did not wear the lab coats or who wore lab coats which were described as painter's coats. The symbolic meaning of the clothing influenced how the participants perceived themselves. While creating objects of wearability, I imagine what future identities and characteristics could exist and how they could be activated with specific vestments, utilizing the power of clothing to transport and transform wearers out of ordinary activity. Providing objects which simulate cocoons, wings and tentacles, I create simulations of species hybridity. These symbols provide an immediate feeling of transformation, and also generate the image which perpetuates that feeling through time.

⁶ Hajo Adam, Adam D. Galinsky. “Enclothed cognition.” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Volume 48, Issue 4, July 2012, Pages 918–925. <<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022103112000200>> Accessed March 25, 2016.



"Medium Exchange"
sofiground, aquatint and line etching on paper
4.5 x 5.75 inches plate size
2015



"Weekend Warriors"
video still
2016

Wearables also hold a capacity to take on the role of the other and impart an understanding of other's perspectives. Hélio Oiticica, a contemporary and friend of Lygia Clark, envisioned worn objects which bring people together. Activating the world beyond the self, Oiticica's Parangoles were a mode of exploring the boundaries where a person 'ends' and something else begins: the collective body. The parangoles brought several elements together,

"The wearing of the clothes/capes and dancing in/with them (the melting of bodies to collective bodies); social and aesthetic protest (the participation in a transgressive orgy); playful participation (in environments, objects, other bodies, or a collective-body) and a mystically enhanced experience (the uniting of my body with those of my mythical figures and profane "gods"). The spectator becomes a "participator" in these arrangements and the artwork becomes a so-called "environment-structure" in which the participants find a space through the activity of "wearing watching": someone puts on one of these works and sees what is

happening to another work that somebody else is inhabiting. In this way, parangolés are appropriated by their wearers; the environment is also transformed in a specific way—it becomes a stage for dancing, demonstrating, and the performing of non-everyday movements.⁷

Oiticica's work melded the worlds of interiority and exteriority, the personal and the collective, while simultaneously reflecting upon and celebrating the manner in which people were brought together.

Time capsules

Video documentation of the wearables in action utilizes a non-authoritative approach to explore interpretations and generate new images and narratives. Giving basic parameters of a particular vestment, such as "Imagine you are emerging from a cocoon," or "Wrap this around yourself like a giant snake," or even as simple as, "Turn in a circle," my participants then interpret these guidelines in ways I often did not foresee or think of on my own, exemplifying another way of removing the authoritative voice and maintaining non-hierarchical relationships. The wearables are also constraining enough to guide movement and self-perception without any verbal preamble. The collaboration between the initial static object and the wearer is rich enough to supply an infinite array of variations and enactments.

I utilize video as a stepping stone in the process of digestion and generation of future material. The record of movement presents opportunities to see myself and others through the filter of a particular placement and framing of composition. Dziga Vertov's manifesto of

⁷ Schober, Anna. *Hélio Oiticica's Parangolés: Body-Events, Participation in the Anti-Doxa of the Avant-Garde and Struggling Free From It*. 2004. MS. Vienna. Web. 27 Mar. 2016. <<https://homepage.univie.ac.at/anna.schober/Schober.pdf>>.

1923 provides a visionary perspective of the possibilities afforded by the moving film camera:

"I am an eye. A mechanical eye. I, the machine, show you a world the way only I can see it. I free myself for today and forever from human immobility. I am in constant movement. I approach and pull away from objects. I creep under them. I move alongside a running horse's mouth. I fall and rise with the falling and rising bodies. This is I, the machine, manoeuvring in the chaotic movements, recording one movement after another in the most complex combinations. Freed from the boundaries of time and space, I co-ordinate any and all points of the universe, wherever I want them to be. My way leads towards the creation of a fresh perception of the world. Thus I explain in a new way the world unknown to you."⁸

Within the video process, the image can be manipulated not only by positioning the camera in a certain way, but also by speeding up, slowing down and reversing the footage, altering and again distorting the original to produce a new translation of image.

The technology of the moving image also affords a practical method to capture the body in motion and examine the dimensions of wearables. Within Merleau-Ponty's system of "bodily space and external space," motion provides a clearer understanding of being:

"it is clearly in action that the spatiality of our body is brought into being and an analysis of one's own movement should enable us to arrive at a better understanding of it. By considering the body in movement, we can see better how it inhabits space (and, moreover, time) because movement is not limited to submitting passively to

⁸ Tw19751. "John Berger / Ways of Seeing , Episode 1 (1972)." *YouTube*, 08 Oct. 2012. Web. 27 Mar. 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pDE4VX_9Kk>.

space and time, it actively assumes them, it takes them up in their basic significance which is obscured in the commonplaceness of established situations.”⁹

Video also functions as a method of gathering a moment and bringing it into the present, creating a time capsule of events. Robert Smithson’s gallery installations represented a specific site through materials gathered from a particular location, yet in the gallery context, lost their “site-ness,” becoming “non-sites.” In a similar way, the videos represent a specific time when a person did actually wear that costume; yet the transport through time, as well as the distortion of time within the video itself, takes the moment away from that particular time and brings the viewer to a non-time. The video is a time capsule of a non-time, non-event, part of a non-history where time is endless.

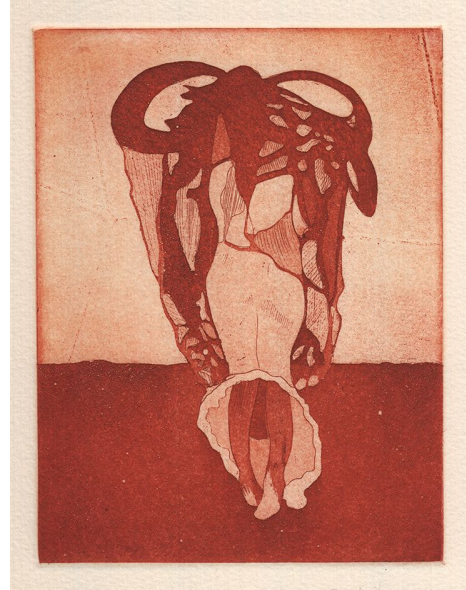
The non-hierarchical, decentralized digital realm provides opportunity to manifest and present a window to another world and to explore a different kind of logic, or non-logic. Saya Woolfalk, a contemporary artist working in the realm of hybridity and utopia, creates installations and videos of worlds “re-imagined through collaboration, imaginative play and masquerade.”¹⁰ Her work resonates with visual pleasure, a gently hypnotic effect of repeating patterns and vibrant colors, which draws in the eye to submerge the mind in her world. The utopia is based on fluidity between identities, as her “Empathics” take on different cultural influences and constantly shift contexts. Within this world, our own world’s tendency toward cultural appropriations comes into focus.

⁹ Merleau-Ponty, p. 117.

¹⁰ Woolfalk, Saya. “SAYA WOOLFALK.” *SAYA WOOLFALK*. Saya Woolfalk, n.d. Web. 28 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.sayawoolfalk.com/>>.



"Welcome"
 aquatint and line etching on paper
 5.75 x 4.5 inches plate size
 2016



"Emergence"
 aquatint and line etching on paper
 5.75 x 4.5 inches plate size
 2016

The commune experiments of the 60's and 70's were valiant and admirable efforts to examine social values and expand ideas about the role of the individual in community. Sociologist J. Milton Yinger, who coined the term counterculture in 1960, explained that "a contraculture sought to transform the norms and values of the dominant society and, if successful, replace its host as the dominant culture."¹¹ In his influential 1969 study *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*, historian Theodore Roszak took this notion a step further beyond the political and into the cultural, "for [counterculture] 'strikes beyond ideology to the level of consciousness seeking to transform our deepest sense of the self, the other, the environment.'"¹² The creative output of this movement is explored in the 2012 volume *West of*

¹¹ Auther, Elissa, and Adam Lerner. "Introduction: The Counterculture Experiment: Consciousness and Encounters at the Edge of Art." Introduction. *West of Center: Art and the Counterculture Experiment in America, 1965-1977*. Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 27 March 2016.

¹² Auther et al., p. xx

Center: Art and the Counterculture experiment in America, 1965-1977. Editor Elissa Auther describes the exuberant aspects of art from this part of social history:

“the majority openly flouted disciplinary boundaries, stressed participation and process over the production of discrete objects, blurred distinctions between artist and audience, rejected ideology and conventional political behavior, and embraced irreverence, contradiction, parody, and play. In many instances, it is difficult or impossible to distinguish between the practice of art and the conduct of lifestyle.”¹³

Though the counterculture experiments often ended in failure and disillusionment, I feel compelled to continue the exploration of the interior and the exterior, the every-day and the extraordinary, and the boundaries between object and subject. By providing a space to examine and “play out” roles, viewers can temporarily enter a mediated no-place and shift awareness for a time.

Labor--the focus and concentration of energy upon utopia

My work reflects an urge to create or revive cultural traditions and rituals which aim at making sense of the world and finding threads common to human experiences, triggering a somatic, physical reevaluation of surroundings. The reclamation, revision, transformation, and translation of the textile tradition of knit and printed fabric provides a tactile experience as a counterpoint to the pervasiveness of screen culture. In his essay examining the impact of digital communities on craft, Dennis Stevens explains, “Objects of traditional craft connect people metaphorically and metaphysically to tangible, sensory experience; for many, these

¹³ Auther, et al., p. xxiii

works of craft become the last remnants of the real.”¹⁴ As a resistance to the intangible, digital realm which continually encroaches on all aspects of life, I channel effort into maintaining connections to the handmade.

In the process of making objects, I prefer to use easily accessible materials such as used clothing and bicycle tires and to repurpose discarded materials, transforming them into objects of craft. Using a knitting machine I also create large swaths of knit fabric, which have a look of being reproducible, similar to the sweaters everyone has in their closets. Instead, the fabric turns into unique, one-off sculptural pieces, the origins of which cannot be determined yet seem vaguely familiar.

Andrea Zittel has been a persistent inspiration to me since my teen years, when I first saw her on Art21 talking about her ultra-minimal wardrobe at the time--one dress for every season, which she crocheted herself. Her pared-down aesthetics are at odds with my own more layered and ornamented style yet I am drawn to her holistic approach to making work which fulfils basic needs. “The central question is how one can live well with as little as possible.”¹⁵ A constant search for alternatives to the mainstream pervades her projects, which often cross over from art into product design and other lifestyle necessities. The experimental yet patiently methodical nature of her work is something I aspire to in my own.

The making is an important aspect of my work, a meditative process which can be arduous and time consuming, and which allows for long stretches of self-reflection and introspection. Repetitive actions aggregate with spontaneous decisions to create a transformative world of wearable objects and prints. Studio work becomes a personal

¹⁴ Stevens, Dennis. "Validity Is in the Eye of the Beholder: Mapping Craft Communities of Practice." *Extra/ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*. By Maria Elena Buszek. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011. 43-58. Print. P. 45

¹⁵ Borchardt, Gesine. "Andrea Zittel." *Art Review* 67.4 (2015): 130-134. *Art Full Text* (H.W. Wilson). Web. 28 Mar. 2016.

ritual; the pieces shown to others are relics of an internal process. Matthew Ronay's sculptural pieces also follow a meditative path, achieving transcendent states through repetition, confluence of materials, and a focus on primordial forms. The shamanic aspect of his work is emphasized through totemic objects and symbolic imagery, such as a multitude of eyes or bundles of wooden staffs.¹⁶ While Ronay's work is muted and restrained in color palette, my pieces emerge in a more exuberant manner, evoking less sobriety and more celebration.



Manifestation Vehicle.
Machine-knit yarn, deconstructed bike tires, vinyl.
Approximately 70 x 30 inches.
2015



Cocoon.
Machine-knit yarn, deconstructed bike tires, chestnuts.
Approximately 30"x30"x60"
2015

The means of production

As a reaction against the industrial revolution which degraded the craftsman and manufacture to an "operative" in a factory, William Morris named his movement "Arts and Crafts", tying the two together as part of his utopian vision "to produce beautiful objects to

¹⁶ Holte, Michael Ned. "Matthew Ronay: MARC FOXX GALLERY." *Artforum International* 48.4 (2009): 242+. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 28 Mar. 2016.

transform society.”¹⁷ Art could not be produced without careful attention of the hand, and craft could not be produced without the creative capacity of the mind. To Morris, the craft worker was the “direct ideological link between socioeconomic reforms and the handmade object...”¹⁸ The beautiful objects were held in high esteem in the day of their production, as well as by collectors today, yet the social transformation did not quite reach the extent Morris envisioned.

Craft remains a focal point in my work as a means of production, reflecting entirely individual and unique efforts and imbuing the work with a sense of the personal. I embrace the do-it-yourself approach as a way to claim agency in the objects and materials which surround me. Allowing the hand to remain visible in the uneven stitching and improvised assembly methods places my work in the human realm, celebrating anomalies instead of emulating conformity. Building on the DIY movement as a “form of domestic creativity that...seeks to confront mass market consumerism and the perceived homogenization of culture as a result of the aggressive expansion of big-box retailers and multinational corporations,”¹⁹ my work reclaims the space of production, creating objects which fulfill a unique function. The tools of transformation are generated by my own organism.

An ever-expanding access to the most obscure cultural practices around the globe makes it easier than ever to find out about and incorporate far-flung and nearby rituals and doctrines. The spiritual “cherry-picking” of which millennials are often accused seems a sensible response to the wide array of belief systems available today. As more people move

¹⁷ Fariello, M. Anna. "Making and Naming: The Lexicon of Studio Craft." *Extra/ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*. By Maria Elena Buszek. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011. 23-42. Print. P. 27

¹⁸ Fariello, p. 34.

¹⁹ Stevens, p. 50.

away from the community of proximity and towards a community of common interest and activity, why not invent new rituals and belief systems? Neo-pagans are a prime example of the inventive and improvisational trend in spiritual enactments. Neo-Paganism offers a glimpse into the petri-dish of religion as it develops in the beginning stages. Since there is no set historical text to follow, individuals and groups are free to explore their own creation of ritual traditions. Enactments are based on a presumed historical precedent, which helps to create a link between the past and present, yet these rituals vary in interpretation even from generation to generation. Drawing on a wide variety of sources, from academic and classical studies of historical folklore--Ancient Greek, European folklore, etc--to contemporary, popular psychology of Jungian archetypes and the Inner Child, and mass media/pop-culture productions such as Star Trek, these rituals are informal, often improvised and draw on participation to imbue the event with proper import.²⁰ Ritual is broadly defined as “a sacred drama in which you are the audience as well as the participant, and the purpose of it is to activate parts of the mind that are not activated by everyday activity.”²¹ The focus is on innovation, variation and experimentation. Participants often make their own ritual implements and garb, incorporating their unique perspective into the larger group goals. My work taps into this kind of collective endeavor to expand the limits of self-perception, to transform the definition of culture and to create connections between far-flung narratives, experiences, and aspirations.

²⁰ Magliocco, Sabina. “Ritual Is My Chosen Art Form: The creation of Ritual as Folk Art Among Contemporary Pagans.” *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*. James R. Lewis, Ed. State University of New York Press, 1996. 93-119. Print.

²¹ Magliocco, 96.

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